

## Saturday, December 9

Psalm 21 *Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power.* (v.13)

It is summer as I write this, and I am unusually aware of rhythms. There is the singsong symphony of the cicadas every evening, the growth cycles of trees and shrubs, the predictable blooming periods of violets and orchids, my very breath and heartbeat. My Daddy kept a calendar to know when each cow would calve, the same date yearly.

Astrophysicists can chart the movements of galaxies and predict the orbits of planets millions of miles away. At the other end of the cosmic scale, scientists are beginning to understand the design of cells with their DNA and genomes. Day and night, the seasons, the phases of the moon, and the characteristics of children in each stage of development are all evidence of God's intricate plan for the universe.

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas referred to God as "the uncaused cause." The more we learn of His incredible designs, the more proof we have that He is the master designer and Lord of all we see and hear and discover.

Amos 5:18-27; Psalm 20; Jude 17-25; Matthew 22:15-22

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## Good News Daily

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### Sunday, December 3

Amos 1:1-5, 13—2:8 *The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds wither, and the top of Carmel dries up.* (v.2 NRSV)

Do you wonder how Amos, a shepherd and dresser of sycamore and fig trees, became a prophet? How could an uneducated man fulfill this role? Being a prophet was not a promising vocation. It was a surefire way to make enemies of the powerful. It required Amos to leave his family and sheep and say things he did not understand. But he did it anyway.

The first pronouncements in Israel were about their neighbors, about sending "a wall of fire" against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, and Judah because they "carried a whole people into exile, kept his wrath forever, rejected the law of the LORD." There is grandeur in this language that could not be expected from a shepherd but sounds pretty authentic as a direct prophecy from God. Amos was tolerated as long as he made dire predictions about the enemies of Israel. But then his rhetoric soared into accusations against Israel and Judah, "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four I will not revoke the punishment" (v.6). It is to be expected that Amos' popularity sunk after such pronouncements. But Amos did not falter, and we should never be faint-hearted about speaking out against sin and corruption in our community.

Psalms 146, 147; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Luke 21:5-19

### Monday, December 4

Amos 2:6-16 *I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way;...so that my holy name is profaned.* (vv.6b-7)

The economy was booming in Israel and the division between the haves and have-nots was increasing. The haves were so comfortable and so into being fashionable, which included attendance at all the religious festivals of the time, that they were unaware they were invoking God's displeasure because of the way they were treating those less fortunate. They were talking the talk but not walking the walk.

In *Secrets of the Vine*, Bruce Wilkinson makes some important points about going through the motions of religious life without cultivating the presence of God by "abiding." "In abiding, you seek, long for, thirst for, wait for, see, know, love, hear, and respond to... a person." God seeks us first: "I

brought you up out of the land of Egypt” (v.10). God gave us a way to communicate with him: “And I raised up some of your sons for prophets” (v.11). And God invites us to respond: “Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel” (v.11).

Is it not indeed so, O people of America?

Psalms 1, 2, 3; 2 Peter 1:1-11; Matthew 21:1-11

## **Tuesday, December 5**

2 Peter 1:12-21 *First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.* (vv.20-21)

It is so easy to discount the Old Testament prophecies as being addressed to that age alone. We live in a post-resurrection age, and we have Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. We think of ourselves as being more civilized, more intellectual, and able to discern what applies to our lifestyle. Does that mean that we are better followers of God’s way? Peter reminds us that the prophets carried God’s own message to His people—all of us—before Christ and after Christ. The message was and is that God loves us and wants us to share eternity with Him. After all, He made us for fellowship with Himself (1 John 1:3).

When Jesus came, he was “the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (v.19). Thanks be to God!

Amos 3:1-11; Psalms 5, 6; Matthew 21:12-22

## **Wednesday, December 6**

2 Peter 3:1-10 *The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but that all come to repentance.* (v.9)

I do not count 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter my favorite book in the Bible. Peter himself is a favorite apostle because we think he was a lot like us. He has abandoned his penchant for action in this reading and is preaching patience to those who have been expecting “the Day of the Lord” and are suffering ridicule by unbelievers. He ties his teaching for the day to the past (creation) and to the future (judgment). Who would have expected Peter to be such a skillful expositor?

Today, few sermons or Sunday school lessons focus on the end time. It certainly is not something that I think about. But if we heed the prophets and Peter, we need to keep it in mind, because, as Peter tells us, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (v.10).

It is a Christian’s duty to be ready, to use the time God, in His patience, gives us to help further His kingdom so that none perish and all come to repentance.

Amos 3:12—4:5; Psalm 119:1-24; Matthew 21:23-32

## **Thursday, December 7**

Matthew 21:33-46 *“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.”* (v.43)

These are Jesus’ words spoken after telling the parable of the vineyard and the tenants who killed the heir. The landowner, of course, is God. The vineyard is a country, any country; in this case it is Israel. The tenants are the religious and political leaders. The Pharisees got the point but were afraid to harm Jesus then. We need to get the point, too. We might dismiss Amos and even Peter, but these are the words of our Lord. The only excuse we could have for not accepting his warning would be that someone misquoted him. That’s pretty flimsy thinking when you consider how many times the warnings are sounded throughout the Bible. We have to identify our “vineyard.” Begin with your home, business or profession, social groups, certainly your church. Expand it to include your neighborhood, city, state, the USA. All of this is on loan from God. “When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” (v.40). Are we ready?

Amos 4:6-13; Psalm 18:1-20; 2 Peter 3:11-18

## **Friday, December 8**

Psalm 16 *Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.* (v.1)

The Scriptures for this week have been pretty gloomy. We are about to embark on the celebration of the Savior’s birth and gloominess doesn’t fit the season. Last December I had a new birth of my own—a Walk to Emmaus.

For all my 73 years I had experienced God as Abba Father. Many prayer times I found myself in His lap. On the Emmaus Walk, I experienced His son, the Living Christ. Love so abounded in that place that I knew that Christ lives in and through all those who came and worked the Walk and in all who came seeking to know him. The experience defies description. But, for me, Jesus Christ is not only the precious babe in the manger, the great teacher, or the man on the cross. “He walks with me and talks with me and tells me I am his own” (*In the Garden*). I can affirm, “Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure” (v.9).

Amos 5:1-17; Psalm 17; Jude 1-16; Matthew 22:1-14